



## United Negro College Fund accepts \$25 million from Kochs, tells Big Labor to get over it

By Sean Higgins

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Calling it guilty of a "profound betrayal of the ideals of the civil rights movement," the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees announced this week that was severing its partnership with the United Negro College Fund.

Why? Because UNCF has accepted donations from conservative philanthropists the Koch brothers, and Dr. Michael Lomax, the fund's president, spoke at a Koch-sponsored event.

Lomax told AFSCME to get over it. "UNCF has over 100,000 donors with a wide range of views, but they all have one thing in common: They believe in helping young students of color realize their dreams of a college education. For over 70 years we have never had a litmus test and we have asked all Americans to support our cause," he said in a statement provided to the *Washington Examiner*.

He added: "While I am saddened by AFSCME's decision, it will not distract us from our mission of helping thousands of African-American students achieve their dream of a college degree and the economic benefits that come with it."

UNCF is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charity that provides college scholarships to minority students. It is famous for the slogan: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

AFSCME President Lee Saunders severed contact in a July 8 letter to Lomax.

"I was deeply troubled by your decision to accept \$25 million from David and Charles Koch," Saunders wrote. The Kochs are funders of various conservative and free-market groups and have become the progressive left's favorite bad guys as a result.

Taking the money was bad enough for Saunders. The final straw though was when Lomax spoke at a Koch Brothers-sponsored event in California.

"This was a betrayal of everything the UNCF stands for," thundered Saunders in the letter. "Your appearance at the summit can only be interpreted as a sign of your personal support and the UNCF's organizational support of the Koch Brothers' ideological program."

Lomax's reaction may reflect the fact that the Koch brothers' donation apparently far outstrips AFSCME's support. The Huffington Post reported that the national union previously made annual donations to UNCF of between \$50,000 and \$60,000 with local affiliates also kicking in, bringing the total to "hundreds of thousands" of dollars annually.

AFSCME is one of the nation's largest unions, with nearly 1.4 million members providing more than \$179 million in dues annually, according to a 2014 Labor Department filing.

Last week, the fund announced that it had accepted the \$25 million donation. The money will create a program to "provide scholarships for exemplary students with demonstrated financial need and an interest in the study of ... entrepreneurship, economics, and innovation."

"We are enormously grateful to Koch Industries and the Charles Koch Foundation for their long-standing support of UNCF and for helping to create new opportunities for earned success and a better future for our students," Lomax said in a June 6 press release.

How does accepting the donation violate the fund's mission? Saunders argued that the Kochs "have devoted themselves for more than decade to attacking the voting rights of African Americans. They support voter identification laws. They seek to restrict early voting and voter registration. They support laws that threaten organizations that seek to register voters in the African American community."

The Kochs have repeatedly denied that they support voter ID laws. "Koch has no formal position and has undertaken no advocacy or lobbying on the voter ID issue. To suggest otherwise ... is flatly untrue," Koch Industries said in a 2011 statement after the NAACP made a similar claim.

The charge that the Koch brothers support voter ID laws comes mainly from the fact that they have provided financial support to the American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative group that has advocated for such laws. The Kochs claim they support ALEC for its advocacy on other free-market issues.

While the Kochs do underwrite ALEC, the extent appears to be overblown. The Center for Public Integrity reported last year that Koch Industries gave ALEC \$150,000 in 2011. According to its IRS filings, ALEC received \$7.7 million in contributions and grants that same year, meaning the Koch money amounted to less than 2 percent of its overall funding. For comparison's sake, the Kochs also gave \$4.4 million to the George Mason University Foundation the same year.

As the GMU and UNCF donations show, the Koch brothers don't just support conservative causes. They are major donors to the arts as well and also back civil liberty causes. They reportedly donated \$20 million to the American Civil Liberties Union, one of the principle *opponents* of voter ID laws, in 2003. (I say "reportedly" because while the donation is commonly cited on the Internet, I cannot find a primary reference to it. The ACLU said it doesn't divulge any information on its donors. A Koch Industries spokesperson also declined to comment.)

Asked about the Kochs' claim that they do not support voter ID laws, an AFSCME spokesman said the more important reason why UNCF should not have accepted the donation was because the libertarian Cato Institute wrote a friend of the court brief in last year's Supreme Court case, *Shelby County v. Eric Holder*.

In that case, the court rolled back a Voting Rights Act restriction placed on some regions, predominately in the rural south, regarding changing their local election laws. The VRA had required them to get "pre-clearance" from the Justice Department first, but the court struck down the main provision in the act regarding it. Liberal groups condemned the decision, arguing the restriction was still urgently needed.

The Cato Institute's legal brief disagreed, calling the restriction an "anachronism" because the VRA had been so successful. "While celebrating its achievements, we must recognize that this success has obviated its constitutional legitimacy."

The Kochs are long-time supporters of the Cato Institute. David Koch is on its board of directors.